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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 MADRID 000545

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [CU](#) [SP](#)

SUBJECT: SPAIN/CUBA: FM MORATINOS PLANNING TO VISIT HAVANA

REF: A. MADRID 426

[1](#)B. LISBON 750

[1](#)C. MADRID 538

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Classified By: DCM Hugo Llorens, reasons 1.4 (B) and (D)

[1](#)1. (C) Summary. MFA Director General for Iberoamerica Javier Sandomingo informed DCM on March 23 that Spanish Foreign Minister Miguel Angel Moratinos plans to visit Cuba, though no date has been fixed. Sandomingo (strictly protect) shared this with the DCM during a readout of the March 17 visit to Madrid of Cuban FM Felipe Perez Roque, making clear that Moratinos himself was the strongest proponent of a high level Spanish visit to Cuba and that others in the media "and in the Zapatero Government" opposed such a visit. He said that MFA Secretary of State for Iberoamerica Trinidad Jimenez, who was on travel with the Royal family, had asked Sandomingo to brief the DCM on Moratinos' intention to visit Cuba, per her agreement to keep the USG informed (REF A). Sandomingo assessed that a Moratinos visit could help advance Spanish objectives in Cuba, including increased dialogue with potential post-Castro leaders, Cuban agreement to allow the resumption of Spain's development aid to Cuba, and the reopening of the Spanish Cultural Center in Havana that was shut down by Castro in 2003.

[1](#)2. (C) The DCM asked whether Spanish officials saw any real signs of change in Cuban Government policy that would warrant such optimism or the symbolism of a high level Spanish visit, noting the Cuban Government's continued strong repression of dissidents. Sandomingo acknowledged that he did not see much evidence of substantial policy shifts in Cuba, but allowed that such changes might be taking place. He reviewed overall Spanish objectives in Cuba, saying the fundamental objective was to get the Cuban Government "to leave its people alone and let them lead normal lives." The DCM asked that the USG be informed immediately if a date was set for a Moratinos visit, noting that any surprises would be badly received by the USG since we had tried in good faith to coordinate Cuba policy with Spain. Sandomingo said that Trinidad Jimenez had emphasized with Moratinos the need to advise partners prior to making news of such a visit available to the press. Post's assessment is that Moratinos is indeed the driving force behind Spanish plans to visit Havana. The Zapatero Government's desire to firm up its left wing in the runup to key May 27 regional/municipal elections may be one factor in Moratinos' plans to go to Cuba, but his rivalry with Jimenez and his conviction that he can affect change in Cuba through

good relations with Perez Roque may be more important considerations. The fact that this visit does not have unanimous support virtually guarantees that internal differences on this policy will be aired in the Spanish media. End Summary.

//PEREZ ROQUE VISIT//

13. (C) The DCM requested the meeting with Sandomingo to review the March 17 visit of Cuban FM Perez Roque (REF B). Sandomingo provided a brief readout, saying Perez Roque had mostly reviewed long-standing Cuban grievances, such as the EU Common Position, the existence of the 2003 EU Restrictive Measures on Cuba (suspended at Spain's behest in 2004), and the continuing elaboration of an EU strategic document regarding Cuba. Sandomingo discussed Spain's views on each of these issues, saying that the Common Position was not particularly effective, but it was the best available tool in the absence of EU consensus on how to deal with Cuba. He said that Spain had "nothing against" the development of a strategic document on Cuba at the EU level, but that the drafts shared by other EU members contained language that would guarantee a break in Cuban-EU relations. Sandomingo asserted that maintaining a principled stand on the need for democracy in Cuba was a key element of Spanish policy, but so was Spain's determination to keep open its channels to the Cuban leadership. The DCM noted that President Zapatero himself had recently publicly declared his preference for a democratic Cuba and suggested that further statements by Spanish officials along these lines would be very helpful in sending the right message to the Cuban leadership.

//MORATINOS WANTS TO GO TO CUBA//

14. (C) Ending his review of Perez Roque's visit, Sandomingo said that, at Trinidad Jimenez's request, he wanted the DCM to know that the MFA was working to lay the groundwork for a

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Moratinos visit to Havana and that he (Sandomingo) would be going to Cuba on March 25 to establish the parameters for such a visit. Sandomingo said that he would not be going to Havana with proposed dates, but said that it was Moratinos' intention to visit Cuba. (NOTE: The conservative Spanish daily "ABC" reported March 23 that Moratinos planned to visit Cuba during the second half of April, despite mixed signals from Jimenez as to whether this trip was on the agenda. END NOTE). Sandomingo pointed to the controversial nature of this planned visit and said that he expected strong criticism of a Moratinos visit not only from the opposition Popular Party, but also from Spanish "media generally sympathetic to the Zapatero Government and from members of Zapatero's Government itself." However, he dismissed as irrelevant the media speculation surrounding contradictory public statements by Trinidad Jimenez this week regarding Cuba, telling the Spanish Senate on March 19 of MFA plans to visit Cuba, then telling a Parliamentary committee on March 21 that there were "no plans to visit Cuba."

15. (C) Sandomingo said that the Spanish Government saw Cuba as being in the initial phase of a period of change, though Fidel Castro's reemergence might delay progress for the time being. He said that Spain's primary objective at the moment was to promote stability in Cuba and to put itself in a position to influence the orientation of the post-Fidel Cuban leadership. He suggested (without much enthusiasm) that a Moratinos visit could advance specific Spanish objectives in Cuba, including:

-- Cuban agreement to allow resumption of Spanish development programs in Cuba, unilaterally suspended by Cuba in 2003. Sandomingo said that, ideally, Spain could convince Havana to allow the resumption of all EU aid, but that the resumption of Spanish aid alone would represent a victory. He said that Spanish aid was aimed at fomenting the growth of Cuban civil society.

-- Cuban agreement to reopen the Spanish Cultural Center in Havana shuttered by the Cuban authorities in 2003. Sandomingo said that he had opened the Cultural Center during his stint as charge d'affaires in Havana and that the first session had been a discussion of Spain's political transition (much to the annoyance of Cuban Government officials). He said that the Cultural Center had served as one of the few channels of uncensored information to the Cuban people and as a "free space" for Cuban intellectuals and other citizens.

-- Launching discussions on Cuba's need to repay outstanding official short-term debt to Spain (REF C). Sandomingo assigned much lower priority to this objective, saying the political objectives were at the forefront of Spanish MFA efforts.

//FEW SIGNS OF CHANGE//

¶6. (C) The DCM asked whether Moratinos decision was final. Sandomingo said that the decision would not be finalized until dates for a visit had been fixed, but that he was certain that Moratinos wanted to go to Cuba. The DCM asked whether Spain saw any signs of positive change in Cuba that would warrant such a high level visit, noting that the regime continued to crack down on dissidents. Sandomingo acknowledged that he had not seen anything more than minor, unspecified indicators of a desire for change by Cuban officials. However, he allowed that change might be underway and that this could justify a Moratinos visit. Sandomingo reviewed Spain's objectives in Cuba, which he broadly defined as convincing the Cuban leadership to "leave its people alone and let them lead normal lives." He said that, unfortunately, Cuba's repressive apparatus had eliminated internal political pressure as a factor, but said that the poor socio-economic conditions experienced by the Cuban people represented a significant factor that did have to be taken into account by the Cuban Government. Spain's assessment is that some in the Cuban leadership, including around Raul Castro, agree with the need to cease harrassing the population and are open to reform. Sandomingo argued that it was important to encourage Cuba's post-Castro leaders, to make them feel less fearful of change and therefore more willing to accept a shift in the status quo.

//KEEPING USG INFORMED//

¶7. (C) The DCM underscored the importance of Spain

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maintaining close consultations and a dialogue with the USG on Cuba and asked that the MFA advise the USG immediately if Moratinos confirmed his plans to travel to Cuba. The DCM reiterated A/S Shannon's request that Spain "not leave the USG alone" on Cuba and coordinate with us as much as possible, given our joint interest in a democratic Cuba. He laid down a marker, cautioning Sandomingo that any surprise announcement of a Moratinos visit to Havana would be badly received in Washington, particularly in light the USG's good faith effort to coordinate with Spain on Cuba policy. The DCM regretted that he had had to wait five days for a readout of the FM Perez Roque visit after having first requested such a meeting on March 19. Sandomingo said he fully agreed on the need for good communication and noted that Trinidad Jimenez had emphasized to Moratinos the need to brief key partners (meaning the USG) before announcing to the media any specific plans by him to visit Havana. On the issue of discussions with the USG, Sandomingo said that Trinidad Jimenez would likely be forced to postpone plans for an April visit to Washington and that May presented a better opportunity. Sandomingo confirmed that both he and Jimenez would be in Madrid for the May 17-18 conference organized by the Inter American Dialogue.

//COMMENT//

18. (C) While disappointing, Moratinos' planned visit to Cuba does not come a shock, given media reporting over the last few months of a possible visit. Post's assessment is that Moratinos is indeed the driving force behind Spanish plans to visit Havana. The Zapatero Government's desire to firm up its left wing in the runup to key May 27 regional/municipal elections may be one factor in Moratinos' plans to go to Cuba, but his rivalry with Jimenez and his conviction that he can affect change in Cuba through good relations with Perez Roque may be more important considerations. The Spanish Government is well aware of USG sensitivities on this issue (see REF A). The depth of internal differences within the Zapatero Government is somewhat surprising and reflects the varied expertise of those involved. Moratinos has little experience on Cuba and appears optimistic regarding his ability to change Cuban leadership behavior. By contrast, Trinidad Jimenez, Javier Sandomingo, and MFA DG for Foreign Policy Rafael Dezcallar have worked on Cuba for many years and are more skeptical of the Cuban leadership in general, and of Spain's capacity to change their behavior. In any case, the fact that this visit does not have unanimous GOS support virtually guarantees that internal differences on this policy will be aired in the Spanish media

Aguirre